

ROBBINS BARSTOW, Ph.D.
Director Emeritus, Cetacean Society International
190 Stillwold Drive, Wethersfield, CT 06109 USA
Phone: 860-563-2565 E-Mail: RobbinsB@aol.com

25 May 2001

Donna Wieting
Chief, Marine Mammal Conservation Division
Office of Protected Resources
National Marine Fisheries Service
13 15 East-West Highway
Silver Spring, MD 20910-3226

Dear Ms. Wieting:

Congress and the American people care about whales.

The issuance by the NMFS of its proposed rule to grant the Navy a "small take permit" for operating a Low Frequency Active Sonar program would fly directly in the face of the Congress's repeatedly expressed concern for the protection of whales and other cetaceans and the overwhelming opinion of the American public that whales deserve special and overriding consideration.

The great bulk of scientific evidence indicates that the Navy's requested LFA "small take" exemption would have a much more than "negligible" impact on a wide range of whale and dolphin species, and other marine mammals. Based on prior experiences with low frequency sonar operations in the Bahamas and the Mediterranean, the effect of the Navy's currently planned LFA program would be absolutely devastating to cetacean populations.

It promises to become an environmental disaster of enormous proportions, with totally unacceptable short-term and long-term results. Congress and the American people would be outraged at this irreparable harm to one of the most indispensable parts of the global ecosystem.

I have personally been involved in the whale conservation movement for more than 25 years, having served for 18 years as Executive Director of the Cetacean Society International. I have four times been a member of the United States delegation to meetings of the International Whaling Commission, and I have attended countless scientific conferences regarding whales and other cetaceans.

I am convinced that the Navy's Final Environmental Impact Statement disregarded basic scientific and ecological data, and was seemingly drafted to arrive at a foregone conclusion irrespective of the objective evidence.

In Concurrent Resolutions repeatedly adopted by the U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate over the past decade, the sense of the Congress has been strongly affirmed that:

"Whales, dolphins, and porpoises (cetaceans) are unique marine resources of great aesthetic and scientific interest and are a vital part of the marine ecosystem;" and that:

"Whales are subject to increasingly grave environmental threats from nonhunting causes, such as pollution, loss of habitat, increased shipping, oil, and gas exploration, oil spills, and the use of driftnets and other nonselective fishing techniques, which underscore the need for special safeguards for whale protection" and that:

"United States policy should promote the maximum conservation and protection of whale, dolphin, and porpoise populations."

It is precisely because the requested "small take permit" for the Navy's projected LFA operation would have just the opposite effect from providing "maximum protection" of whales, that I strongly urge the NMFS not to issue the Proposed Rule.

Sincerely,



Robbins Barstow, PhD
Director Emeritus, Cetacean Society International

Copy to: Senator Joseph I. Lieberman